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A PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE.

Truly a wide subject this: one hardly to be dealt with "on half a sheet of note-paper," whether we try to set forth our "Weltanschauung" or to enumerate and explain the various items of "Lebensweisheit" we have so far gleaned. In point of time I suppose the latter should come first, for we certainly learn empirically much practical wisdom before we even begin to construct our mental chart of the heavens and the earth; but the Weltanschauung, including as it does perhaps our professed religion and certainly what Carlyle calls our *real* religion, stands indisputably first in order of importance. So immeasurably first does it stand, indeed, that I dare unhesitatingly say this: as each person arrives at the age when judgment, conviction, and responsible action are possible, his first and greatest duty is to find out what he really with heart, mind, soul, and strength can believe on the great fundamental questions: What is the truth concerning God? Man? Nature? Duty? Happiness? Beauty? Wealth? Wisdom? He must, in short, study to settle for himself some at least of the unanswerable questions that underlie the simplest as well as the broadest problems of thought and conduct. For, if we could but realise it, each of our actions and decisions, however small, is in deed and in truth a fragment of our answer to these great questions; and the sum and burden of that answer will be shouted forth involuntarily by each one of us at the day of judgment — that answer, in its fullest *subjective* form, being our character; in its fullest *objective* form, our life-story and the far-reaching consequence in other lives of each action and decision we made.

So, I repeat, let us exercise our powers of consciousness, will and reason, in deliberately formulating for ourselves the Major Premises on which depends our solution of each question of thought or practice as it arises. As life goes on we shall add to the number of these Major Premises, partly by virtue of greater discernment and wider experience, and partly by the natural development of "corollaries" to the old ones. But so intimately will these fundamental Premises

be associated with every fibre of our thoughts, desires, and feelings that we shall soon find them as the laws of the Medes and Persians. Therefore it is a responsible and arduous task, this construction of the skeleton of our Philosophy; it involves much weighing and considering, much scrutiny of all the contents of our mental pigeon-holes, much pushing to furthest conclusions with a view to acceptance, rejection, or—most educative and stimulating of all—probation. “C'est le premier pas qui coûte,” and soon the chambers of our mind feel airier and more orderly, though at first pitifully empty—the back-yard being full of rubbish cast out for destruction, and the attic at least half full of theories labelled “Doubtful.” However, once we are sure of some fundamental principles, “corollaries” will be soon found and brought down from the attics, and the contradictory tenets gradually unmasked, bound in bundles and burnt.

Or at this stage we may liken our “Weltanschauung” to a pioneer's map: only a few prominent mountains and headlands marked, the rest undefined, no coast-line known for many miles. For instance, we may be quite sure of these propositions:

1. God is love.
2. God is almighty.
3. Acquired tendencies are not hereditary.
4. Habit is ten natures.

These “axioms” stand up like mountains discerned afar off, but we do not yet know at what distance from them is the shore, nor the contour of the land. So at first we do not realise that for us the sea of incompatibility covers any solution but one of such questions as:

1. The eternal fate of infants dying unbaptised.
2. The Unity or Trinity of the Godhead.
3. The possibility and the means of rescuing children of the submerged or criminal classes.
4. Predestination.

But by dint of zealously contemplating our primary landmarks, our eyes become far-sighted and clear-sighted, and we discern the coast-line, the border between the Land of Truth and the Sea of Contradiction, and even descry some of the islands in the Archipelago of Exceptions, perhaps.

It is to the lack of this serious contemplation—the word

implies not a casual admiring glance but a fixedness of attention—that we owe half the grievous inconsistency, shallowness and flippancy of the present time.

On Sunday we thrill with real emotion (ah! there's the rub!) as we recite the noblest of all Major Premises and listen to the ethical “corollaries” thereto.

On Monday we agree—quite sincerely for the moment—with an Anglo-Indian friend that after all religion is a matter of climate, and that it is a pity to disturb the Hindu's or Mohammedan's creed, which is so amply sufficient and so eminently suitable for him.

On Tuesday we cheat the Customs or a railway company of a few shillings, and really think it is not wrong to defraud the Government or a company.

On Wednesday we read with intense pleasure a wonderfully-written French novel, abounding in sensual suggestiveness and an atmosphere of moral pollution. Nevertheless, at a meeting of the G.F.S. Associates we are truly shocked and grieved that some poor girl has forfeited her card of membership under Central Rule III.

On Thursday we entertain that delightful Mr.—, whom we know to be a man of immoral life, though Society shuts its eyes to the facts. Possibly we lose—or gain—at Bridge some large sum.

On Friday we go shopping, and buy some extraordinarily cheap blouses and silk petticoats, etc., at prices which—would we but *think*—clearly proclaim that the maker must have been paid a starvation wage. Then we perhaps invest in a lovely fur coat at a price considerably higher than we ought to or can afford.

On Saturday we find we positively can't send the gardener's convalescent child to the seaside to recover its strength.

Now I wish to make my point very clear; the mischief does *not* lie in the simple fact that we are doing a number of wrong things and leaving a number of right things undone; it lies in the fact that we are not in the least acting (subjectively) wrongly, *i.e.*, not doing the least violence to our conscience. The real flagrancy of our conduct is, not that we serve Self and Mammon all the week, but that we also quite sincerely worship God on Sundays, and for a few minutes night and morning; that we hold with our right

hand the gospel of getting on, and with our left hand—evangelically ignorant of what its brother is doing—the gospel of the Incarnation.

If we do the one (whichever one we choose) we ought by every law of intellectual truth—and of dramatic unity—to leave the other undone. But we have squared the circle, reconciled the irreconcilable; we *can* and do serve God and Mammon, neither hating the one nor despising the other. Tartuffe and Pecksniff are dead; the conscious and half-conscious hypocrite have vanished from amongst us; like Louis XI., we are sincere in our insincerity, true in our falseness, ingenuously double-minded, blind to the contradictions between the various beliefs we hold and by turns act upon. We have swallowed the camel, and why strain out the gnats?

The function, then, of a Philosophy of Life is to bring all our life and being, thoughts, hopes, beliefs, desires, affections, words and deeds, into unity; to give us the strong sincerity of true simplicity or single-mindedness, so that we may "to our own selves be true, and it shall follow as the night the day we cannot then be false to any man." If we have such a philosophy, good or bad, at least our life can no longer be divided into a number of watertight compartments. We shall not then have each several selves: a Society self, a religious self, an everyday self, with a keen eye to the main chance, and perhaps a poetic or speculative thinking self. But we shall be "natures at interflow with all of themselves and their past."

I need hardly add that this philosophy by no means guarantees the *objective* truth of our opinions or the *objective* rightness of our conduct. The truth it ensures is none the less valuable because it is *subjective* truth: sincerity, consistency, unity, and consequently strength. Obviously, if the Major Premises held are mistaken ones, the fact that they are embodied in a Philosophy of Life and pushed to their logical and practical conclusions intensifies the evil, and the result may be a Torquemada, a Calvin; just as, intensifying the good, we may have a S. Francis, a Brother Laurence, a Carlo Borromeo. But in any case the gains would far outweigh the losses; in the world we should eliminate the larger half of evil: that wrought by want of thought. And in the individual there would be a wonderful

deepening of consciousness and strengthening of intellectual grasp and of will power. We should get rid of that intellectual *subjective* sin S. Paul seems to mean when he says: "*Whatever is not of faith is sin.*"

I should like to make a map of my Philosophy, like the famous Carte de Tendre. I should enjoy marking the principal mountains, each with its own name and that of the pioneer who told me of its existence and enabled me to find it for myself—such as Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Victor Hugo, Browning, Ruskin, Scott-Holland, Kant, Tolstoi, Paterson Smyth, and others. Also I should enjoy marking various quicksands and submerged rocks, with the names of various people who led me to believe they were *terra firma*, such as Drummond, various Ritualistic authors, and others. But, after all, it would be like many essays and much fancy-work: a pleasure to the perpetrator and a bore to everyone else. So I refrain, and fall back on a comparison, likening my Philosophy of Life to a Protamœba, which without differentiation of parts performs all necessary vital functions.

The essence of my Protean Philosophy can be stated in many ways—in fact, cannot be formulated exhaustively. Thus:—

Religion is not a purely subjective thing; a matter only between God and each individual soul.

Or:—

Man's nature is indivisible, and therefore he *cannot* be religious with one part alone, but his body, soul (social powers), and mind must necessarily partake with his spirit in religious life—if he have any religious life.

Or:—

Man cannot be isolated from the organism, Society, of which each individual is an integral member. Therefore he cannot enter into any relation whatever, including spiritual relation with God, except as a member of that organism.

In other words:—

A righteous society or community cannot exist except as the sum of (at least a majority of) righteous individuals, any more than a community can be said to be healthy if most of its members are diseased. Conversely: righteous individuals cannot compose a society that is unjust, corrupt, evil.

[It is obvious that the Incarnation cannot but be intimately—most intimately—connected in my mind with this fervent but inarticulate belief that I am trying to transcribe. God became Man; Mankind, Humanity; Humanity taken up into the Godhead; the At-one-ment, Resurrection, Ascension, the Descent of the Holy Spirit, the Sacrament—these underlie my thought, but I cannot here do more than just indicate the fact. If my meaning hitherto is at all intelligible, the bearing of the one idea on the other will be discernible, and, in any case, I could not in these few pages adequately develop this train of thought. So with this apology for the hiatus in my reasoning I resume.]

The religion of the Incarnate God, true Christianity, is *not* a theology, and especially not a scheme whereby individuals may manage to go to heaven when they die. (I put the matter baldly, but that is really the gist of most ecclesiastical "Christian" teaching, though of late years it is cloaked by the suppression of the alternative, Hell, and by more ethereal and artistic presentment of the joys of Heaven than was the fashion in olden times.) But Christianity is a real present thing: a sonship, a brotherhood, a fellowship, a kingdom to which a man must belong either not at all or wholly, with body, mind, soul, and spirit.

The purpose of the Incarnation, or at least the purpose that concerns us by far the most nearly, the purpose of which our Lord spoke continually and fervently, and so clearly that we read that the people wished to take Him by force and make Him king then and there; so clearly that on that ground the priests persuaded Pilate to order His execution; so clearly that His most intimate friends quarrelled seriously over their precedence when they should share the highest places at His court—that purpose was to found on earth the kingdom of heaven, like the distant colonies of Rome and Athens in the ancient world. A *real* kingdom, with laws, patriotism, and civil bonds of the closest kind linking its members together. And what a King at its head! The real King, of whom Carlyle has given us back the ideal—the Man who *knows* and *can*—how Carlyle revels in the idea of kingship. But the *knowledge* of our King transcends even our wildest dream of knowledge. Limitless is the measure of what our King *can*. Not only *can* He defy death, not only *can* He alone of all kings truly forgive, but—crowning power

and mark of divine Kingship—His very "biddings are enablings." Truly it is the archetype of Kingship and the very type of command.

So the fullest life, the most truly human life, the happiest life, the only harmonious and complete life is life in the kingdom of heaven. Christianity, being a discipline, an atmosphere, a life and a kingdom is the true home of the whole of our manifold yet indivisible nature. Nothing in our life need be outside it, can be outside it—time, money, talents, relations—whether business, domestic, or social—ambitions, desires, affections, art, political economy, politics.

Before passing on to give a few examples of the deductions and corollaries to the chain of Major Premises stated above, I will enumerate a few of the propositions ruled out as incompatible, with the remark that they may perhaps not be inherently incompatible, though as I understand them they are clearly untenable.

The Pauline Theological System (as far as I understand it).

Calvinism and popular "Miltonic" Theology.

Ecclesiasticism—Roman, Anglican, or other.

Ritualism.

Pessimism.

Hackelism.

Ibsenism.

"Sweating"—Lead-glazing, &c.

Millionairism or "Covetousness," which is idolatry.

Speculation on the Stock Exchange or otherwise.

Idleness.

Luxury.

Class-pride.

Secularised Education.

Party Spirit and Denominational Rivalry.

Perhaps the most useful of the corollaries to my Major Premiss is the rule of conduct known as Kant's Categorical Imperative—a re-statement of the Golden Rule. One doesn't know whether it is right or wise to do this or that. Perhaps one feels the question is too trivial to matter. Perhaps one feels in a moment of exaltation an impulse to disproportioned alterism—I am not speaking here of emergencies calling for heroic measures, but of every-day problems, parts of the routine of life. The right answer can be found by asking: If every person in similar circumstances did as I propose doing would the result of their action be favourable or unfavourable to justice and happiness? Thus, putting far from us the thought of "saving our own soul" through our actions, we escape by the light of our beacon, Idea, from

the Scylla of carelessness and the Charybdis of a mistaken self-sacrifice that harms instead of benefits its object by fostering in him or her selfishness, inconsiderateness, meanness.

Most blessed of all the deductions from the Weltanschauung of mine is this: the possibility and the duty of peace of mind, contentment, happiness. What other temper could be desirable in any one (or in all) of the members of this kingdom? "He that believeth shall not make haste." He that serveth a king whose service is perfect freedom, who is love, wisdom and might, whose biddings are enablings, has need indeed to be diligent and conscientious in his service, but need not, must not, worry or fret. Only his very best is worthy to be done in the kingdom; only his very best is wanted; also, the kingdom is large; all sorts of work are wanted in it; all sorts of workers are in it, and the distribution of power and of work lies not in our hands but in the hands of the king. So we are delivered from the burden of worry and the necessity of that strenuousness which seems to consist in trying immensely hard to do what we can't do, just because we, forsooth, consider that to be the most necessary work to be done. If we are razors, in the name of the Categorical Imperative, let us not in sheer impatience set ourselves to do the work of axes, and if we are but brooms, let us not try to paint pictures for the elevation of the masses.

Hence we come to feel rather than to formulate a classification of words and deeds into galvanic, dead and useless on one hand, and on the other living, active, and forceful, the latter being those that are full of personal meaning, warm with the glow of Personality. "You can't give what you haven't got" is eminently true in mental and spiritual things. "You aren't meant to give what you haven't got, and therefore don't give a counterfeit article instead," is still more true. Only what is vital counts. Therefore I distrust cut and dried systems, fascinating in their completeness, whether they be systems of education, of study, of life in general; I distrust all that tends to exalt external symmetry regardless of the inner life. Better a lop-sided tree in which every twig is alive than a perfectly symmetrical tree one-half of which is made of iron and tin cunningly painted. Which proposition we may apply to countless questions: the restoration

of works of art, modern Gothic architecture, the purchase of "complete sets" of books, imitation jewellery, machine-made lace, veneer of all kinds, company manners, and also to the entire series of problems in education. Very much is gained when we realise the difference between knowledge and wisdom, memory and understanding, reception and assimilation, matters of fact and truth, money and wealth, idleness and rest.

An important consequence of this view of dead and living words and deeds is a certain horror of the deliberate use of personal influence. I am extremely uncomfortable if I find a right thing has been done "just to please me"—quite as uncomfortable as if a wrong thing has been done for the same reason. I cannot bear to see children and young people dependent on another person's judgment and initiative, except for things clearly beyond their ken. "Obedience which is not in the last analysis, obedience to conscience is immoral"—even if the action be perfectly right.

On the other hand, this theory of living words makes one extremely chary of discounting what people say by the common verdict, "he can't really mean it," "it is not to be taken literally," or by the use of longer methods of explaining away awkward sayings. Thus, purely as a matter of principle and literary honesty, I object to hearing people destroy the meaning of the saying, "Blessed are ye poor" by the words "in spirit," applied with precisely the same effect as the last two words of the old-fashioned statement, Parallel lines meet in infinity, *i.e.*, not at all. In the same way I condemn the practice of regarding the expression, "Kingdom of heaven" in the Gospels as a formula interchangeable and synonymous with the word "*Church*" in its common connotation.

So my one great principle covers all the ground of my thought and remains still inexhaustible, being so wide and deep that I cannot measure nor fathom it, nor express even what I have grasped of it. It indeed defies formulation, but since as a working hypothesis it embraces and explains all I have hitherto learnt of the facts and truths of life, I hold it fast as my Philosophy of Life.